

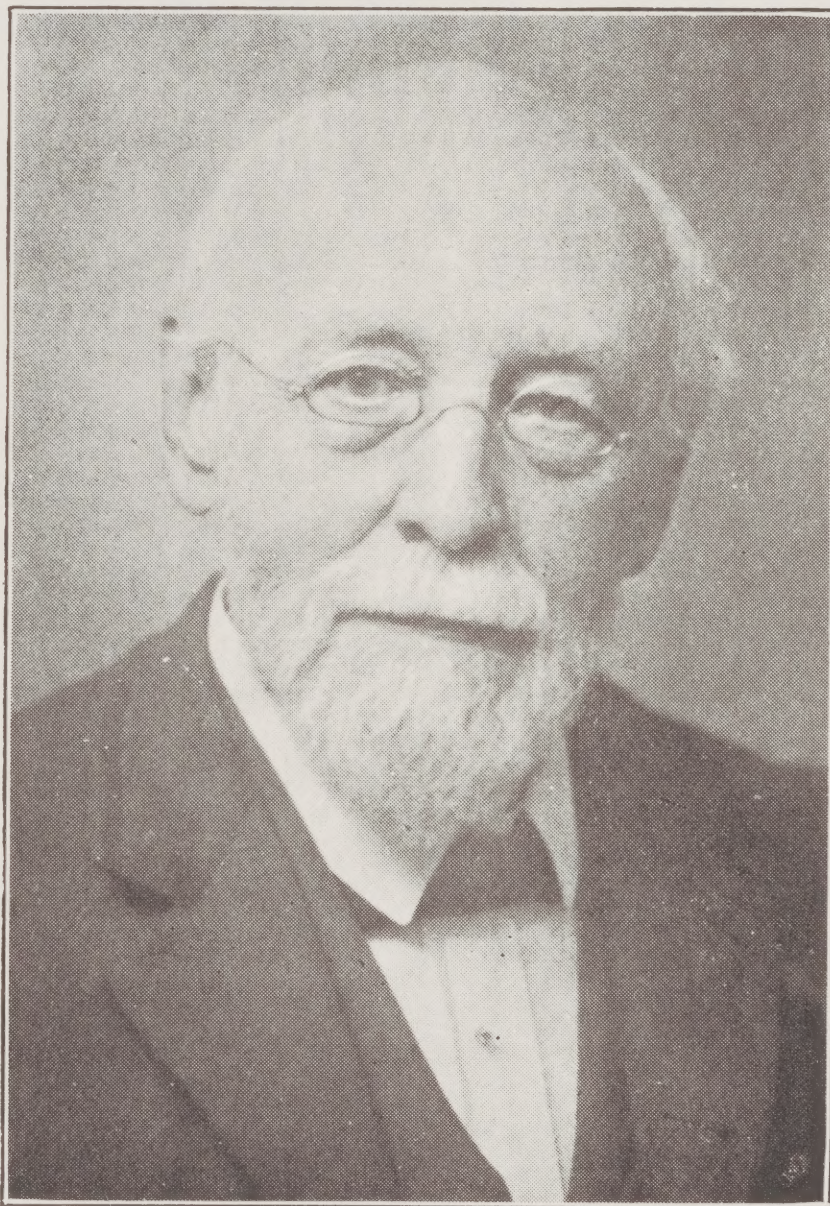
THE

# Early Coins of America

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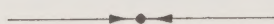
SYLVESTER S. CROSBY





SYLVESTER SAGE CROSBY  
1831-1914

# THE EARLY COINS OF AMERICA



SYLVESTER S. CROSBY

QUARTERMAN PUBLICATIONS, INC.

LAWRENCE, MASSACHUSETTS

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THE  
Early Coins of America;

AND THE  
LAWS GOVERNING THEIR ISSUE.  
COMPRISING ALSO DESCRIPTIONS OF  
THE WASHINGTON PIECES, THE ANGLO-AMERICAN TOKENS,  
MANY PIECES OF UNKNOWN ORIGIN,  
OF THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES,  
AND THE  
FIRST PATTERNS OF THE UNITED STATES MINT.

BY SYLVESTER S. CROSBY.



BOSTON:  
PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHOR.  
1875.

Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Seventy-three, by  
SYLVESTER S. CROSBY,  
In the Clerk's Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.



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*Sylvester Sage Crosby at age 29 (standing just to the right of center)  
at a family gathering in Charlestown, New Hampshire in 1860.*

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL FOREWORD.

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A renewed interest in early numismatic literature has developed among numismatic scholars and collectors: The books that significantly advanced knowledge at the time of their publication have regenerated a deep respect for the accomplishments of those authors. In the study of numismatics the changes that have occurred from time to time in research methods, in classification of detail, in illustrative techniques, and in methods of presentation in such books have become almost of as much interest as the numismatic items themselves. *The Early Coins of America* by Sylvester Sage Crosby has been recognized from the time of its publication as an outstanding masterpiece in American numismatics. Written over a century ago, this monumental undertaking was reprinted without editing in 1945, 1965, 1970, and 1974 and is now being reprinted again. The long-term influence of such a landmark justifies commentary on the history of its preparation and its bibliographical details.

In 1869 the New England Numismatic and Archaeological Society appointed Crosby as chairman of a committee of six to publish a book on the early coinage of America. At that time the existing general references on the subject were *An Historical Account of American Coinage* (Albany 1858) by John H. Hickcox and *American Numismatical Manual* (Philadelphia 1859, 1860, and 1865) by Montroville W. Dickeson. Hickcox made a fine start, but

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*Note:* Certain documents, notices, and other material relating to the historical background of *The Early Coins of America* are reproduced in a Bibliographical Appendix at the end of this volume. This material is referred to in this Bibliographical Foreword along with items which are part of the book itself.

only a start, in the assembly of documentary material. Dickeson's work, in spite of the extensive scope of his project and his enthusiastic approach, and in spite of the variety designations, detailed tables, and profuse hand-drawn illustrations, was recognized even by his contemporaries to be incomplete and quite inaccurate. So there was at the time a real need in the field for a scientific approach. Also, photographic illustrations of coins had become more feasible. So Crosby enthusiastically accepted the challenge, and in July 1869 he began his research by writing an open letter published in the *American Journal of Numismatics* requesting rubbings, foil impressions, coins, and information. From 1869 through 1872 he gathered data. Though done with the cooperation of many numismatic collectors, dealers, and historians, the job still demanded superb efficiency and intense devotion. The help from his own committee was minimal; the minutes of the sponsoring society show a discussion of the matter only once, at their April 21, 1870, meeting.

The manuscript must have been substantially completed by November 1, 1872, when a letter prospectus stated that the book would also appeal to other than those interested in numismatics and that 350 copies of the book were to be printed at a cost to subscribers of \$10 each. There were few takers though, and, unfortunately, by July 1875, almost three years later, when the final parts of the book were printed, only 22 organizations and 138 individuals had subscribed. The problems Crosby faced during those years were staggering.

Publication of the book was to begin early in 1873. Originally it was to be composed of about ten parts, one to be issued each month. Each part was to contain 32 quarto pages, one plate of photographic illustrations, and an extensive number of line drawings. The parts were sent out in gray-green paper wrappers featuring the title of the work and showing the part number, the price of the part, and the year. It is these wrappers that disclose many of the publication problems.

The front page of the first five wrappers contains the imprint, "Charles Chaplin, Printer, 89 Washington Street, Boston," under the border. Charles Chaplin was the vice-president of the New England Numismatic and Archaeological Society, not only a member of the committee of publication but the person who had suggested the coinage research project in the first place. Beginning with the wrapper for Part 6 his name was removed. His name as printer is also on the back of the originally-intended title page dated 1873, but when the back of the revised title page dated 1875 was printed, "T. R. Marvin & Son, Printers, Boston" and that firm's elaborate insignia were substituted for Chaplin's.

Equally ambivalent is the publisher listing. Whereas the book's originally-intended title page, dated 1873, which came with Part 1, shows the New England Numismatic and Archaeological Society as publisher, both the revised title page dated 1875 and the wrapper for combined Parts 11 & 12 which contained the revised title page, show "Published by the Author." Similarly, the originally-intended three-page undated "Introduction" acknowledges the cooperation of 22 persons and is signed "The Committee of Publication," but the revised "Introduction" dated July 1, 1875, which came with combined Parts 11 & 12, expresses appreciation to 26 persons and is signed "S. S. Crosby."

The first printing of the inside of the front wrapper for combined Parts 11 & 12 announced that the book was complete and offered additional copies for sale, either bound or in parts. It did not contain any instructions about substituting the revised title page dated 1875 and revised Introduction in place of the original title page dated 1873 and the original Introduction which were included in Part 1. This omission was soon noticed after some distribution took place and was corrected by a second printing of the inside of the front wrapper with the addition of a three line instruction for the substitution of the revised portions and the cancellation of the original ones.

Crosby admitted in the revised Introduction that his task was "arduous" and that the support promised him by the committee never did materialize. It is a common experience that work assigned to a committee usually results with either one member doing all the work or no worthwhile work being done. Numismatics should be grateful it was the first alternative in this case!

The work load in copying and checking written and printed material, assembling data, studying coin varieties, screening opinions of others, assembling coins, coin casts, and impressions, arranging for heliotypes, preparing tables and coin drawings, planning layout, proofreading, etc.—all before typewriters and photocopiers—was immense. And it must have been a personal economic drain on Crosby. By the end of 1873 when at least half of the parts of the book had been printed and distributed to subscribers, there were less than 160 subscriptions (160 being the final total on completion of publication in July 1875) out of a goal of 350 subscriptions. His receipts by the end of 1873 at \$10 per book did not amount to \$1,600 when \$3,500 was expected. The financial Panic of 1873 was taking place. Charles Chaplin, as printer of the first five parts, must have been concerned that his future printing charges would not be promptly paid and no longer wished to proceed. It is an assumption only, but logical, that it was the New England Numismatic

and Archaeological Society's lack of adequate funds that was the primary cause of Crosby's taking over the function of publisher in the middle of the project. It must have been Crosby's personal promise of payment that convinced T. R. Marvin & Son, printer for the *American Journal of Numismatics*, to take over the printing of Part 6 and subsequent parts. Thus Crosby, whose original assignment was author and committee chairman, became promotion manager, financial underwriter, and publisher as well.

In addition to the letter prospectus dated November 1, 1872, advertising for Crosby's book consisted in part of the same text as the original prospectus placed on the inside wrappers of the *American Journal of Numismatics* in all four issues of 1873 and the first two issues of 1874. Crosby also distributed another broadside solicitation for subscribers in November 1873. In October 1874 he announced the necessity for an extra part at an additional subscription cost of \$1. Crosby distributed a final sales prospectus when the book was completed in July 1875 and had increased the price by another \$1 to \$12 because two extra parts were needed instead of one.

The Boston Numismatic Society, of which Crosby was an active member and officer, also kept the public aware of the progress of *The Early Coins of America* by including in its *American Journal of Numismatics* notices about and excerpts from Crosby's book: In its April 1873 issue it was mentioned that Part 1 was just issued; in July 1873 that Part 2 was "on our table"; and in October 1873 that Part 3 was distributed. Crosby's own advertising circular continued the chronology of publication by stating in November 1873 that five parts had been published. The October 1874 issue of the *American Journal of Numismatics* commented that "the tenth and probably last number" was at the press. The *Journal* for July 1875 seems to show lack of sympathy for the delay: it said that the "Eleventh and last number is finally complete." This referred to the combined Parts 11 & 12.

The inconsistency in the 1873 dating on the wrappers of Parts 7 through 10 (the interior contents of the parts were actually printed in 1874) can be explained by the fact that those wrappers were apparently all printed in advance with the assumption that the planned schedule of publication could be met.

The question has often come up as to why the filing in the Clerk's office of the Library of Congress is dated 1873 on the back of the revised title page when there was no 1873 edition and in fact the book was still being printed in 1874 and 1875. The answer is that the copyright was entered on January

30, 1873 as No. 817, and since the book came out in parts, the date of the filing of Part 1 was properly retained even though subsequent parts were filed with the Clerk through 1875.

The Boston Numismatic Society's support was not as whole-hearted or beneficial as it might have been. It was not until December 4, 1873, over one year after the original solicitation, that the Society, which had its own library, decided to subscribe to Crosby's work. Also probably affecting the number of subscriptions to Crosby's book was the publication in the *American Journal of Numismatics* of edited and illustrated excerpts from the book: in October 1873 one on Massachusetts silver coinage; in January 1875 one on Vermont coinage; in July 1875 one on Fugio coinage; and in October 1875 one on Nova Constellatio coinage. And for the first of these excerpts appreciation was given to the New England Numismatics and Archaeological Society by the *Journal* editor, who stated, "We are indebted to publishers of *The Early Coins of America* for the obliging manner with which they have allowed us to use the cuts for the following article, and to make copious extracts from their work, now in course of publication." The editor did acknowledge that Crosby personally gave permission for the use of the text and cuts for the three excerpts published in 1875. It is difficult to understand why the author permitted these major excerpts to be published at a time when subscriptions to the book had been so sparse and sales were still being sought.

Four family members showed their loyalty to Crosby as original subscribers to his publication, namely: his brothers, William Crosby and Samuel Trevett Crosby; his first wife's brother, William Curtis Capelle; and John Robinson from his mother's family. A bound volume has been located with the name of the author's nephew, James Allan Crosby, stamped in three times. From the Boston vicinity Crosby's fellow collectors and loyal friends comprise another 62 names in the subscriber's list out of an international total of 160.

There were also problems in the preparation of the ten photographic or heliotype plates, obvious from an examination of them. On Plate I the coin number and the two items of text on the background of the plate as well as the plate number in the top margin are overprinted onto the heliotyped images. On Plate II and Plate III the coin numbers, text items, and plate numbers, and the words "HELIOTYPE PATENT" are pasted on before photography.

The Heliotype process, invented in England in 1869 by Ernest Edwards, consists of placing bichromated gelatin upon a waxed glass plate and expos-

ing it to the sun from the back through a negative photographic film. The gelatin is stripped off the glass and attached by a rubberized solution to a flat pewter plate. The unexposed gelatin is washed away with warm water leaving unaffected the areas of the bichromated gelatin that have been exposed to light. This produces a surface that holds ink on the areas that are to be dark in the illustration and is usable for printing multiple copies.

An examination of various examples of Plate I shows that some of the overprinting is off register as evidenced by the coin numbers touching or slightly overlapping some coin illustrations, or not being centered between the obverse and reverse images. Since the overprinting was done sheet by sheet, a new procedure of pasting labels was adopted to avoid the registry problem: What was originally overprinted was first printed on a blank sheet, cut out, and pasted in a proper position on the background of the pieces to be photographed. Then the negative and heliotype were made and no overprinting was necessary. This is evident on Plates II and III and on a few examples of Plate IV. The result was unsatisfactory, though, as some of the numbering and text was discolored, unattractive, and almost illegible.

So most examples of Plate IV and Plate V have overprinted coin numbers, plate numbers, and other text, using the same method employed in making Plate I. But since it was necessary to include many coins on each subsequent plate, the registry problem in overprinting coin numbers remained critical. Thus another procedure was tried out: Before photographing, the coin numbering was applied to the background with handwritten ink numbers, including ink lines pointing to each obverse and reverse pairing. This writing is in Crosby's hand. The plate number and "HELIOTYPE PATENT" text could then be overprinted onto the top and bottom margins of the heliotype print without causing the complex registry problem. This procedure was used in preparing a few specimens of Plate V and apparently all of Plates VI, VII, VIII, IX, and X.

There exists an unbound heliotype print of the coin illustrations belonging on Plate V that includes handwritten coin numbering, and on that print there is an erroneously overprinted "PLATE IX" in the top margin and "HELIOTYPE PATENT" in the center of the bottom margin. When this plate was corrected with the proper plate number, the "HELIOTYPE PATENT" imprint was moved nearer to the left side of the bottom margin. These erroneous plates were noticed and corrected, though, before inclusion in the issued version.

It seems that thin positive plaster casts of each obverse and each reverse of the illustrated coins were used for preparation of heliotype illustrations. Foil copies would have had wrinkles and other defects. The edge of the left side (particularly the lower left side) of many coin illustrations has an applied darkening rather than a natural shadow, indicating that the plaster edges had to be blocked out on the negative. Also, the illustration of the obverse and reverse of the same coin make it impossible to make a plate from one exposure of the original coin, and piecing negatives or rephotographing positives would have been impractical at that time. Then too there are not the light and dark variations on the coin surface illustrations that would normally exist if the coins themselves were photographed directly; the exception being Plate V, coin number 25, which has such variations and could have been two original coins or stained plaster casts. Plaster casts of the coins for photographic purposes obviously involved the borrowing by Crosby of the originals of most coins to be illustrated, which could be done because enthusiastic cooperation by the few major collectors of that era was naturally forthcoming.

One of Crosby's major innovations was the designation of an obverse die variety with a number and a reverse die variety with a letter (first done by him in 1869 with respect to 1793 cent varieties). This was particularly important as to coinages where multiple die interlocking was prevalent. This classification improvement has been used in much American die variety work since then.

A critical review of Crosby's book by Dr. Edward Maris was published in the October 1875 *American Journal of Numismatics*. The Editors of the *Journal* added their praise but took exception to Maris's criticism of Crosby's omission of certain items because Crosby classified them as medals. That was not the end of Dr. Maris in connection with this work: In the April 1876 *American Journal of Numismatics* Dr. Maris offered for 50 cents each a plate of 48 varieties of Connecticut, Vermont, and New Jersey coppers not illustrated in Crosby's book. This plate was purchased by some subscribers and, if their book had not already been bound, was usually inserted opposite page 282. The Maris plate was produced by the Woodbury (collotype) photographic process. It contained a transposition of 1787 Connecticut reverses in varieties 4-M and 6-L, pointed out by Dr. Hall in his 1892 publication.

In 1878 an edition was issued identical to the 1875 edition of Crosby's book except for three items on the title page: The publication date was changed from 1875 to 1878, the publisher was given as "Boston—Estes & Lauriat—301 Washington St." (Crosby is no longer designated as publisher), and the 1776 Massachusetts State copper illustrated on the title page has had the "AE" removed from the ligature connecting the obverse and reverse (someone must have felt that the designation of the metal was not consistent with the other illustrations in the book). The 1878 edition contained the same errata page as the 1875 edition with none of the corrections made in the text. Even the original "Directions to the Binder" was retained. The existing number of 1878 editions appears to be no more than one tenth the number of 1875 editions. All this leads to the conclusion that some of the unsold, unbound parts that Crosby still had he sold to Estes & Lauriat, who had the title page modified and reprinted by T. R. Marvin & Son, then bound and sold to the public without any other textual, plate, or other changes. The 1878 edition is therefore not a reprinting from the existing stereotype forms. The remaking of additional heliotype plates would have been quite impractical also.

Shortly after July 1886 an advertising circular issued by Lyman H. Low & Co. of New York City stated that there had been printed "a single edition of 500 copies" of Crosby's book. The circular also claimed that Low had just bought all of Crosby's remaining copies of the book and that Crosby up to that time had held the price at \$12 in wrappers and \$15 bound. The Low circular offers the book at \$6 bound in half Morocco, \$7 with an uncut gilt top, or more with a special binding. Low was probably aware that Scott & Co. in its *Coin Collector's Journal* for December 1882 had advertised Crosby's book for the reduced price of \$10 handsomely bound in Scott's own bindery.

The assertion by Low ten years after publication that 500 copies were printed cannot be accepted as accurate because of prior reliable statements to the contrary. The *American Journal of Numismatics* continuously from January 1873 through April 1874 repeated and emphasized the 350 total printing, just as Crosby had stated on November 1, 1872. Crosby himself used the expression, "a very small and limited edition only being printed," in his November 1873 announcement after at least five parts had been printed and repeated that comment in his July 1875 announcement after all printing had been completed. In his October 1874 announcement he stated that the list of subscribers was "not full" and his July 1875 printing of the names of subscribers in combined Parts 11 & 12 showed that total subscriptions ag-

gregated only 160 which was less than half of the 350 copies which Crosby had stated would be printed. Thus there was no reason for the number planned to be printed to be increased.

Virtually all subscribers or their binders threw away the poor quality paper wrappers when they had the parts bound. Wrappers were obviously not included when bound volumes were ordered directly from Crosby; Estes & Lauriat; Scott; or Low. Nevertheless an occasional example has the wrappers bound in. The instructions in the second printing of the inside of the front wrapper of combined Parts 11 & 12 to substitute the revised title page and the revised Introduction furnished within that wrapper for the original title page and Introduction were generally followed, but a few bound copies include all of them. Those of the bound copies with both original and revised pages might have occurred by inadvertence or because of the previously noted omission of any instructions in the first printing of the inside of the front wrapper of combined Parts 11 & 12. Binding instructions including plate locations were furnished in combined Parts 11 & 12 and would normally have been discarded, but had to be bound into the book because an explanation of "marks and contractions" was printed on the other side of the sheet. Binding instructions were not always fully adhered to; for instance, the plates were sometimes placed at the end of the book, a practical change so that the reader would not be delayed in locating an applicable plate. Dr. Thomas Hall, who expanded Crosby's Connecticut variety classification, had his copy of *The Early Coins of America* bound in that manner. This reprint also adopts that placement.

After the final part was issued, Crosby offered the book bound, as well as in parts. The original subscribers who received the book in parts, though, had to make their own arrangements for binding. Some bought and bound in the Maris plate. Adding the Crosby; Estes and Lauriat; Scott, and Low bindings to all of the individually selected bindings, it is no surprise to find bindings of the original edition in a myriad of styles: leather, cloth, or a combination of both; colored in red, maroon, blue, tan, and black; with and without gilt edges; and with varying text and styles on the gold stamped spine and covers.

Only one complete example of the Crosby publication in original wrappers and with the first printing of the inside of the front wrapper of combined Parts 11 & 12 has been located, that one formerly belonging to the Wadsworth Atheneum at Hartford, Connecticut. Two other virtually complete examples

in original wrappers are known with the second printing of the inside of the front wrapper of combined Parts 11 & 12, one formerly belonging to the American Museum of Natural History at New York City.

In 1980 an unusual state of *The Early Coins of America* was found among the items inherited by his family from Sylvester S. Crosby. It is composed of folios of eight consecutively numbered pages, each folio being a single sheet printed on both sides, having a horizontal fold down the middle and a subsequent vertical center fold. These folios are uncut both at the top and the left side. They are unsewn and loose. The folios are grouped into parts just as the original parts were assembled, except that the 1875 revised title page and the revised Introduction which originally came out in combined Parts 11 & 12 are moved into Part 1 while the 1873 title page and Introduction originally in Part 1 are not present. Each part is laid into a gray green paper wrapper originally printed for Part 1, but the proper part number is pencilled in Crosby's hand over the printed 1 on the left side of the top of the wrapper for each of the last ten parts. Apparently Crosby used some surplus wrappers for Part 1 to make up this example of his book for himself. The inside of the spine of each wrapper was not pasted to the left edge of the folded folios in the manner in which parts were normally prepared for distribution. Crosby's making up and retaining this copy has left an intimate, distinctive, and unique state of this classic publication to posterity. In Part 1 of this copy there was found a February 10, 1876 book notice cut out of *The Nation* commending this book to those of its readers who desire knowledge of the subject matter and pointing out that the "author seems to have relied upon its merits to make it known."

Sylvester Sage Crosby was born in Charlestown, New Hampshire, on September 2, 1831. The family's first American antecedents, Symon Crosby and his wife Ann, had come to Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1743 on the ship *Susan and Ellen*. Crosby's father, Jaazaniah Crosby (1780-1864), graduated in 1804 from the Divinity School of Harvard College and was a pastor in Charlestown, New Hampshire for 54 years during which time he changed the Orthodox Congregational Church into the South Parish Unitarian Church and wrote the history of his town.

The author's mother, Hulda Robinson Sage, was the daughter of Rev. Sylvester Sage (1765-1841) of Westminster, Vermont, who graduated from the Yale College Divinity School in 1787. She became the second wife of

Jaazaniah Crosby on November 13, 1814. The sixth child of that marriage—not the author—born in 1824 and named Sylvester Sage Crosby in honor of his maternal grandfather, died in 1825, thus making the name available for reuse for the ninth child of the marriage who became the author.

At the age of seventeen, Sylvester Sage Crosby became a watchmaker in Charlestown, soon moving thereafter to engage in business at 43 West Street in Boston. He lived in Cambridge and married Mary Elizabeth Capelle on September 1, 1855. She died on October 26, 1874 during the time he was completing his book, and he then married Mehitabel (Hittie) Ackers on September 15, 1875 at Brookline, Massachusetts. There were no children of either union.

Crosby enlarged his business to include jewelry, moving to 240 Washington Street (later renumbered 444 Washington Street), Boston. His avocations, which began with numismatics in 1857, also included archeology, astronomy, and the culture of mushrooms. His first published numismatic work was on the varieties of United States 1793 cents, included in the *American Journal of Numismatics* beginning in April 1869. To this he added a work on the varieties of 1793 half cents, which led to the publication of a consolidated reprint entitled *United States Coinage of 1793* (Boston 1897).

Crosby died on August 18, 1914, of stomach cancer at his residence at 21 Sacramento Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts. He was buried in Monroe Cemetery in Lexington, Massachusetts.

In honor of his achievement Crosby was elected as an Honorary Member of the American Numismatic and Archaeological Society (now the American Numismatic Society) on March 21, 1876. Of the six numismatic scholars whose names were cut in the frieze of the front facade of the 1930 addition to the American Numismatic Society headquarters in New York, Crosby was the only American. He was elected as an Honorary Member of the American Numismatic Association on September 4, 1907 and, posthumously, to its Hall of Fame in August, 1970.

*The Early Coins of America* awakened numismatists to the unique character of the coinage prior to the operation of the United States Mint, for both Colonial America and the period after independence. Stimulated by Crosby's excellence, portion after portion of his book has been amplified by the research of others in over a century since its publication. He also supplemented his own work with articles in the *American Journal of Numismatics* on Sommer Islands Coins (1883), Fugio hub impressions (1902), and U.S. 1804

coinage records (1891). The standard of excellence which the book set has influenced those who work in the same field to do research of the highest scholarship. Fortunately, there have been many of such projects published, and Crosby lived long enough to see some of them. In his field Crosby had solved virtually all of the routine numismatic problems as well as many difficult ones. The reference in books and articles citing *The Early Coins of America* as a source are almost endless. His accuracy in detail is formidable; although omissions and errors can be found in his book, what is amazing is that there are not more. Crosby was wise enough to protect himself in some matters that he could not research himself by giving and crediting the statements and opinions of others. The old couplet he placed on the errata page was characteristic:

"Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see  
thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er will be."

Due to the scarcity of original editions of *The Early Coins of America* the book has become a collector's item itself. It is truly the keystone to any numismatic library of American coinage, and it's truly a pleasure to have a reprint of it to study the coins or merely to read through.

This Bibliographical Foreword is an extensive revision of a similar foreword published by Quarterman Publications in its 1974 Crosby reprint and has benefited from research findings in the interim. Robert J. Wester who located and acquired Crosby's copy of his own book and some Crosby family memorabilia has made available his extensive and important research and documentation. The help of James C. Spilman, Edward R. Barnsley, Richard Picker, and George F. Kolbe is also gratefully acknowledged.

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI  
DECEMBER 1982

ERIC P. NEWMAN